

## LIFE IN ANTEBELLUM KENTUCKY TOUR GUIDE

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### OVERVIEW

This interactive tour program explores the perspectives of slaves, women, and other little-known antebellum people. A theatre performance based on the life of Mary Todd Lincoln introduces program themes. Students examine artifacts of the era and search for clues in the antebellum gallery that aid their understanding of the lives of ordinary people during this period of time.

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

#### *Topics*

- Antebellum Kentucky
- Mary Todd Lincoln
- Slavery
- Women

#### *Academic Expectations*

- Historical Perspective
- Economics
- Culture and Society

#### *Program of Studies Links*

- Recognize cause-and-effect relationships and multiple causes of events in U.S. history.
- Examine how culture in the United States has been influenced by beliefs and behavior of people in America's past.
- Analyze economic systems that developed in early U.S. history.

### CORE CONTENT

- Different perspectives result in different interpretations of historical events (SS-M-5.1.1).
- All cultures develop institutions, customs, and beliefs reflecting their unique histories, situations, and perspectives (SS-M-2.2.1).
- Culture is influenced by language, literature, arts, beliefs, and behaviors and may result in unique perspectives (SS-M-2.1.1).
- History is a series of connected events shaped by multiple cause-and-effect relationships, tying the past and the present (SS-M-5.1.3).
- Political, social, economic, and cultural differences among sections of the U.S. resulted in the American Civil War (SS-M-5.2.4).

### BACKGROUND

In the past some Kentucky historians referred to the antebellum years as the state's "golden age." Farm production was high, Lexington was "the Athens of the West," and Kentuckians played important roles in the national political scene. For the majority of the state's population, though, the years leading up to the Civil War were hardly "golden." Enslaved and free African Americans, married women, and even poor white farmers did not have the rights and privileges enjoyed by the wealthy white men who controlled state politics and economic affairs.

In this program, students meet the little-known people who made up most of Kentucky's antebellum population and consider their perspectives on the period. Through a theatre performance, artifact analysis, and a gallery assignment, they explore the complex conditions of slavery, the diverse circumstances experienced by women, and the variety of daily life in this fascinating era.

### BEFORE THE TRIP

- Define basic terms: antebellum, agrarian, slavery, emancipation, abolition.
- In class, have students discuss what they believe they know about the antebellum period in Kentucky. Who were the most famous people of the era? Why? Who else lived here? What do we know about them?

### IN THE MUSEUM

When you arrive at the History Center, report to the front desk and a museum guide will meet you and lead your group to the classroom, where the program begins. After an introduction, the class will view and discuss *Back to the Bluegrass: Mary Todd Lincoln Comes Home*. Next, the guide will lead the students to the frontier gallery to complete a worksheet assignment. You and your chaperones can help staff help students with the assignment by reading labels and pointing out artifacts and other sources the students may be missing. For the final part of the program, students will return to the classroom for an artifact-based activity that will challenge them to apply their new knowledge of women and slaves in antebellum Kentucky. After completing the gallery assignment, students will be allowed to view the rest of the *Kentucky Journey* exhibit.

We rely on teachers and chaperones to make sure students behave well in the museum, and we reserve the right to ask disruptive students or classes to leave.

#### MUSEUM ETIQUETTE

- Talk, don't yell!!
- Walk, don't run!!
- Use pencils and clipboards for assignments.
- Leave all food, beverages, and chewing gum outside the building.
- Do not use laptops, laser pointers, cameras, or video equipment in the museum.

#### BACK AT SCHOOL

At the end of the program you will receive a postvisit packet with three activities you can use to assess student learning: a list of discussion questions, a creative writing assignment, and an open-response question. Or, assign one of the following writing exercises while memories of the program are still fresh.

- Write a daily journal entry as if you were an person living in antebellum Kentucky. Be sure to describe your duties and responsibilities for that day. You may choose your gender and social status.
- Interview a grandparent or someone your grandparent's age and ask them how opportunities differed for African Americans and women when they were your age from the present day. Publish a transcript of the interview.
- Based on what you learned at the museum, critique the chapter(s) on the antebellum period in your textbook. Discuss what is good the way it is and what could be improved. You may send this review to the publisher of the book.

#### RESOURCES

##### Web sites

Mary Todd Lincoln's Research Site

<http://members.aol.com/RVSNorton/Lincoln15.html>

Mary Todd Lincoln

<http://americancivilwar.com/women/mtl.html>

Antebellum Kentuckians

<http://www.uky.edu/LCC/HIS/I08/project1.html#people>

Slavery in the Antebellum South

<http://www.cc.colorado.edu/Dept/HY/HY243Ruiz/Research/Antebellum.html>

The Antebellum Period

<http://www.westga.edu/~cscott/history/antebell.html>

Online Journals and Books: Antebellum Period through Reconstruction

<http://moa.umd.umich.edu/>

##### Books

Harrison, Lowell H. and James C. Klotter. *A New History of Kentucky*. Lexington, Ky., 1997.

Townsend, William H. *Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil war in Kentucky*. Lexington, Ky., 1989.

##### Documentaries

Abraham and Mary Lincoln: A House Divided---available at <http://www.pbs.org>

Study guide available at

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lincolns/tguide/index.html>

Kentucky Historical Society

Kentucky History Center

An Agency of the Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet

100 West Broadway

Frankfort, KY 40601

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[www.kyhistory.org](http://www.kyhistory.org)



## MUSEUM THEATRE GUIDE

### BACK TO THE BLUEGRASS: MARY TODD LINCOLN COMES HOME

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#### OVERVIEW

Eyewitness to History performances bring exhibit themes to life through dramatic performances based on the lives of Kentuckians from all walks of life. This presentation features one actress who performs in the antebellum section of the exhibit *A Kentucky Journey*. The fifteen-minute piece is based on biographical sources about the life of Mary Todd Lincoln. A museum staff member is on hand to introduce the play and conduct a discussion after it ends.

#### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

##### *Topics*

- Women
- Slavery
- Antebellum Era
- Mary Todd Lincoln

##### *Core Content Connections*

- Historical Perspective: History is a series of connected events shaped by multiple cause-and-effect relationships, tying the past and the present (SS-M-5.1.3)
- Historical Perspective: Political, social, economic, and cultural differences among sections of the U.S. resulted in the American Civil War (SS-M-5.24)

#### BACKGROUND

##### *History*

Born in Lexington, Kentucky, on December 13, 1818, Mary Todd Lincoln, first lady of the United States, was descended from two of central Kentucky's best-known families—the Todds and the Parkers. Her mother, Eliza Parker Todd, died in childbirth when Mary was six. Shortly thereafter, her father married Elizabeth Humphreys of Frankfort. Mary lived with them and their children in a brick house at 578 West Main Street in Lexington. After early education at Lexington's Ward School and the Mentelle boarding school, Mary Todd followed her older sisters to Springfield, Illinois, where she lived with her sister Elizabeth Edwards. In November 1842, she married

Abraham Lincoln, then a lawyer who had three times won election to the state legislature. They had four sons—Robert, Edward, William, and Thomas.

Mary Lincoln lived the typical domestic life of a nineteenth-century, middle-class woman, though she maintained an unusual interest in politics and in her husband's career as a politician. Her great expectations for her husband were realized when after two unsuccessful campaigns for the U.S. Senate, he was elected president of the United States in November 1860.

During the White House years Mary worked hard to turn it into a fashionable mansion worthy of her husband, herself, and the nation. But the Civil War made these efforts seem frivolous. Throughout the war she was often attacked in the newspapers for her extravagance and for her supposed Confederate allegiance. In fact the first lady (she was the first to be called that) was a staunch Unionist. After the death of her son Willie in 1862, a distraught Mary Lincoln often sought comfort among spiritualists.

Following her husband's assassination, Mary struggled financially, though she eventually received \$36,000 from her husband's pension. Following the death of her son Thomas (Tad), Mary suffered periods of extreme grief, which further complicated longtime complaints of severe headaches and emotional disturbances. In 1875 her only surviving son, Robert, committed her to a private asylum, but she was released after only three months. Mary lived in France from 1878 to 1882. She returned to Springfield and died on July 16, 1882.

(From Jean H. Baker's entry on Mary Todd Lincoln in *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 1992)

##### *Plot*

The play takes the form of a conversation with a group of people Mary encounters at her girlhood home when she visits there in 1848. Abraham Lincoln is serving a term in the U.S. House of Representatives and Mary is becoming accustomed to Washington society. She reminisces about her childhood, reflects on her evolving feelings about slavery, alludes to the strain of being a politician's wife, and displays the broad range of emotions she was known for.

### *Setting and costumes*

*Back to the Bluegrass* is set in the gardens of the Todd home in Lexington. The actress wears a two-piece dress, a bonnet, and gloves—the proper attire for traveling and paying calls in the antebellum era.

### *Performance style*

The script is presentational in form, with the actress addressing the audience throughout the production.

## IN THE MUSEUM

When they arrive in the performance area, students will be asked to sit on the floor. (Limited seating is available for students with special needs and adults.) A museum staff member will provide a brief introduction to the play. After the fifteen-minute performance, the actress will come out of character to participate in a follow-up discussion with the audience.

We rely on teachers and chaperones to make sure students behave well during performances, and we reserve the right to ask disruptive students or classes to leave.

### AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

- Show respect for the performers and other museum guests by not talking.
- Do not use recording devices, cameras, or laser-pointers during the performance.
- Do not touch or talking with performers unless instructed or encouraged to do so.

## RESOURCES

### *Websites*

Mary Todd Lincoln's Research Site

<http://members.aol.com/RVSNorton/Lincoln15.html>

Mary Todd Lincoln

<http://americancivilwar.com/women/mtl.html>

### *Books*

*Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* by Jean Baker (New York, 1989)

*Lincoln and the Bluegrass: Slavery and Civil War in Kentucky* by William H. Townsend  
(Lexington, 1989)

### *Documentaries*

*Abraham and Mary Lincoln: A House Divided*, available at <http://www.psb.org>

## ASSESSMENT

Please help us evaluate the effectiveness of the program by completing and returning the evaluation form.

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